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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6409
INFO RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 1573
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 1392
RUEHQU/AMCONSUL QUEBEC PRIORITY 0835
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1246

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SUBJECT: HAITIAN OFFICIALS WARN ILLEGAL MIGRANTS

REF: PORT-AU-PRINCE 867

¶1. Summary. A Haitian migration official and prosecutor denounced persons who undertake and organize migrant voyages during a June 15 conference on clandestine sea migration held on the Ile de la Tortue. Though the message coming from Haitian officials on illegal migration, delivered with accompanying graphic photos of shark-bitten corpses, is a welcome step in changing permissive attitudes toward alien smugglers, illegal migrants, who are already in desperate straits, are just as likely to ignore the authorities' threats against them. End summary.

¶2. Jeanne Bernard Pierre, the chief administrator for the Office of National Migration and Michenet Balthazar, the government prosecutor for the northern port city of Port-de-Paix, participated in the conference organized by parliamentary Deputy Marc Antoine Francois and attended by Poloff. Displaying the graphic photos of shark-bitten corpses of Haitian migrants from a capsized boat off the coast of Turks and Caicos (reftel), Pierre denounced the organizers of the clandestine voyages as criminals, pointing out that they took the desperate migrants' money, knowing that the overwhelming majority of migrants will not reach their destinations, and if they do, are ultimately repatriated. She also denounced the cottage industry that has sprung up to serve the illegal migrants and emphasized that the difficulty of obtaining a U.S. visa was no excuse for embarking on clandestine voyages.

¶3. Balthazar noted that he understood that many residents on the poverty stricken island wanted to leave. Nevertheless, they need to respect and fulfill the legal conditions for their departure. He bluntly stated, "If you try to go illegally, you will be arrested and you will go to prison for a long time." He repeated that the same would hold true for the organizers of the clandestine voyages.

¶4. Senator Evaliere Beauplan of the Northwest Department, also attending the conference, claimed that the GoH and the USG had to accept that the GoH's lack of a comprehensive development plan for the Northwest Department and the USG's visa requirements were the driving forces contributing to the clandestine voyages.

¶5. Comment. Pierre's and Balthazar's comments prompted

vehement responses in the Q&A sessions from participants who agreed with the senator's position that people mired in poverty are justified in trying to escape their circumstances. Balthazar's failure to draw little distinction between alien smugglers and their victims certainly exacerbated the audience's negative response. The government's limited capacity to prosecute and jail anyone "for a long time," also certainly undercut his tough talk. Nevertheless the conference, which received national media attention, was a welcome first step from Haitian officials in condemning the predatory practices of alien smugglers and highlighting the dangers in emigrating by sea.

SANDERSON